

[Review] Rüdiger Wolfrum (ed.)(2012) The Max Planck encyclopedia of public international law

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Book Review

The Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law
reviewed by Yinan Bao

The publication of the second printed edition of The Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law (MPEPIL) by Oxford University Press in spring 2012 can be regarded as a remarkable event in the academia of public international law. This book review provides a brief summary of the notable features of this renowned encyclopedia. It reveals that the second edition not only updates most of the traditional topics of public international law in its first edition but also keeps pace with the recent development of public international law by adding hundreds of newly written entries. The variety of the contributors from all over the world also ensures that the second edition of the MPEPIL fully represents the global scholarship of public international law. Moreover, the research-friendly features and its comprehensive bibliography make the second edition of the MPEPIL an indispensable learning resource for public international students and scholars.

Rüdiger Wolfrum (Ed.), *The Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law* (second edition, Oxford University Press 2012). ISBN: 978-0-19-929168-7. Hardback in 10 volume set, 11,724 pages, £1,995.

The publication of the second printed edition of *The Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law (MPEPIL)* by Oxford University Press in spring 2012 can be regarded as a remarkable event in the academia of public international law. This long awaited new edition of the authoritative *MPEPIL* is the printed edition of its online counterpart.¹ The online edition was originally launched in 2008 and is updated three to four times a year.² The current printed edition is published in ten volumes, containing 1,618 articles in total.

In recent years, several reference works in the field of public international law have become available to international law students and scholars, such as the third edition of *Parry & Grant Encyclopaedic Dictionary of International Law*,³ the second Japanese edition of *A Dictionary of International Law*,⁴ and the Japanese *Encyclopedic Dictionary of International Law*.⁵ All of these international law dictionaries cover topics from the core branches of public international law yet, are less than one thousand pages in length. In comparison, the *MPEPIL* contains several features that make it distinct from all other international law reference works.

First and foremost, the *MPEPIL*'s scope is unparalleled and very comprehensive, covering the majority of public international law scholarship. To be specific, the *MPEPIL* includes subject areas ranging from the history of international law to international human rights protection and from international cooperation to international dispute settlement. Topics of traditional branches of public

¹ The *MPEPIL* Online Edition can be accessed on its official website: <<http://www.mpepil.com>>.

² The latest update took place in January 2013 which brought the total number of articles to 1,639.

³ J.P. Grant and J.C. Barker (eds.), *Parry & Grant Encyclopaedic Dictionary of International Law* (3rd edn. Oxford University Press 2009)

⁴ The Japanese Institute of International Law (ed.), *A Dictionary of International Law* (2nd edn. Sanseido 2005).

⁵ Tsutsui Wakamizu (ed), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of International Law* (Yuhikaku 1998).

international law such as statehood, territory, law of the sea, the law of diplomatic and consular relations, the law of State responsibility, and the law of war and neutrality are all well presented. Moreover, attention has been paid to branches of public international law, which have been developed more recently such as international environmental law, international economic law, the law of international organizations, and the law of outer space, to name but a few. Articles from these newer branches, which were not available in the first edition, include 'Cyber Warfare', 'Internet', 'Sustainable Development', and 'World Trade Organization (WTO)'. In addition, over 200 cases and decisions from various international courts and tribunals, as well as arbitration awards are analysed and assessed in the new version. These include 'classic' international law cases such as the *Caroline Case*, the *Lotus Case*, and the *Island of Palmas Arbitration*, as well as more recent cases from the International Court of Justice such as the *Wall Case*, and the *Kosovo Advisory Opinion*. The current edition also covers a wide range of thematic topics, which are not easily found in other international law dictionaries. Perhaps the most valuable of such thematic topics are those entries in the subject of 'theories of international law' (such as traditional natural law theory, legal positivism, legal realism, and radical Marxism but also theories of Feminism and 'critical theory'). Notably, there is an article about the Islamic approach to international law, which has seldom appeared in any other international law reference works. Further thematic topics include geographic issues (eg, 'Taiwan', 'Tibet', 'Chechnya', 'South Ossetia') and a number of specific armed conflicts (eg, the 'Arab-Israeli Conflict', the 'Iraq invasion'); as well as numerous international treaties and instrument.

Secondly, compared with other international law reference works, this edition of the *MPEPIL* is perhaps one of the most up-to-date reference works of public international law.⁶ All the aforementioned classic cases of international law have been thoroughly rewritten by contemporary scholars, with new insights and revaluation. In addition, many classical issues of international law, such as 'Sovereignty', 'Nations', and 'High Seas' have been updated to show how these classic issues have evolved over the past two decades. According to the general editor of the current edition, only 12 articles in the current edition are taken from the first edition verbatim.⁷

The third distinct feature of the *MPEPIL* is the variety of its contributors. Like its first edition, articles from the *MPEPIL* are written by leading international scholars from all over the world.⁸ Unlike the first edition, which was published near the end of the Cold War and was inevitably dominated by scholars within Western Europe and North America, the current edition is a product of true global scholarship. It therefore allowed non-Western scholars to put forward their distinct opinion.⁹

The fourth distinct feature of the *MPEPIL* is its 'research-friendly' layout. Like in the first edition, each article begins with a table of contents, and each paragraph of the main text is labelled numerically for referencing purposes. Another very good feature retained from the first edition is that many key terms in the text are cross-referenced to other articles of the *MPEPIL*, so that if the reader wants to explore some relevant topics or background information to the current entry, he or she can follow the in-text 'arrow sign' to get more information. This 'in text cross reference' feature is highly useful for readers starting a new research project for which extra background information is needed. More significantly,

⁶ Though obviously, the printed edition of *MPEPIL* will not be updated as frequent as its online counterpart. By far, it is still unclear whether there will be any printed supplement which will include the recent online updated articles.

⁷ See the Preface of the *MPEPIL* by the general editor, Rüdiger Wolfrum.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ However, it is a pity that no Chinese scholar has contributed an article to the *MPEPIL*.

each article includes a comprehensive list of documents as well as an academic bibliography, which in my opinion, can be regarded as an invaluable source for international law students and scholars.¹⁰

Admittedly, whereas the printed edition of the *MPEPIL* has the aforementioned merits, its retail price may discourage students and even scholars to purchase a personal copy. Indeed, the retail price of the printed edition is nearly five times that of the annual subscription of the online edition.¹¹ In addition, the printed edition will not be updated as frequently as its online counterpart. Nevertheless, in my opinion, for those who are planning to pursue an academic career in public international law, it would be more economical to purchase the printed edition for their long term of study.¹² For students who start their studies, or plan on studying public international law for a shorter term, subscribing to the online edition is probably a better choice. Alternatively, international law students and scholars can recommend that their university libraries either subscribe to the online edition or purchase the printed edition. After all, the printed edition is dubbed 'library edition' by the general editor of *MPEPIL*.¹³

To sum up, the new printed edition of the *MPEPIL* will probably be regarded as a 'godsend' to international law students and scholars who are dedicated to the study and research of public international law. It will undoubtedly be regarded as an indispensable reference book for international law students and scholars, and I therefore strongly recommend it.

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¹⁰ There is an extra 'Index and Tables' volume which contains a useful list of all the entries as well as the bibliography and relevant documents. It has recently been published by Oxford University Press in March 2013 (ISBN: 978-0199657919. Hardback, 1,112 pages, £250).

¹¹ The annual subscription price for the online edition is £325 for the current year, plus 20% VAT. So the total price is £390.

¹² In fact, the price for annual subscription of the online edition increased from £275 in 2011 to £325 in 2013. Thus, for PhD students and career researchers, to purchase the printed edition would be more economical.

¹³ See the Preface of the *MPEPIL* by the general editor, Rüdiger Wolfrum.